



**MICHAEL PEZZULLO**  
**SECRETARY**  
**DEPARTMENT OF HOME AFFAIRS**  
**Opening Statement**  
**Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee**  
**Budget Estimates**

**Friday, 28 October 2022**

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In line with the Government's focus on immigration as a nation building function, which supports economic and social policy objectives in relation to Australia's prosperity and cohesion, and with the support of the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, and with the strong endorsement of the Minister for Home Affairs and the Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs, I have established the position of Associate Secretary Immigration, who is the second most senior officer in the Department. I am pleased to be able to inform the Committee that Ms Stephanie Foster PSM agreed to take up the position and commenced on 10 October 2022.

The Associate Secretary will lead the existing Immigration and Settlement Services Group, as well as the recently-established Immigration Reform Task Force, and the People Smuggling Policy and Implementation Task Force, which works very closely with the Operation Sovereign Borders Joint Agency Task Force.

I refer the Committee to the recently published tenth edition of the Department's *Administration of the Immigration and Citizenship Program* report. The report highlights efforts underway in the recovery from COVID-19, to enable more people to enter Australia and address critical skill shortages, while simultaneously addressing the visa backlog. In particular, I draw your attention to data that shows from 1 June to 30 September 2022, the Department finalised close to 2.29 million temporary and permanent visa applications, including nearly 1.45 million visitor, student and temporary skilled visa applications.

To ensure we are organised to deliver on the Government's policy agenda, the Department will undergo a significant restructure on 1 November 2022. In addition to the establishment of the position of Associate Secretary Immigration and aforementioned Immigration Reform Task Force, I have decided to establish a Strategic Initiatives Group under the leadership of Deputy Secretary Marc Ablong. He will lead a number of taskforces which will focus on longer-term initiatives in terms of cyber security strategy, national resilience (as it relates to natural and other hazards), and the protection of our democracy from foreign interference and other threats.

Following amendments in the last Parliament to the *Security of Critical Infrastructure Act 2018*, implementation is well underway. The Mandatory Cyber Incident Reporting obligations and Register of Critical Infrastructure Assets obligations have commenced, and the Risk Management Program obligation is out for consultation, as required under the Act. The Minister for Home Affairs has also designated 82 Systems of National Significance under the Act; this will trigger associated Enhanced Cyber Security Obligations for some designated Systems, which are being worked through by the Department in consultation with affected parties.

Noting this is the Department's first appearance before the Committee since the recent machinery of government changes, I welcome the National Emergency Management Agency's inaugural Coordinator-General, Mr Brendan Moon AM ASM, to the Home Affairs portfolio. On 1 September 2022, the National Recovery and Resilience Agency was merged with Emergency Management Australia to form a new executive agency in the Home Affairs portfolio, the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA). The Coordinator-General commenced in the role on 6 October 2022, and has been leading NEMA's response to the recent devastating flooding in south-eastern Australia.

I wish to assure the Committee that other recent machinery of government changes, which were related to law enforcement and criminal justice matters, have had no adverse impact on cooperation and integration of effort across the areas of activity which fall under the oversight of the Counter-Terrorism Coordinator (Deputy Secretary Andrew Kefford), the Counter Foreign Interference Coordinator (again, Mr Kefford), or the Cyber Security Coordinator (Mr Ablong, who will continue in that role after he takes up the Strategic Initiatives role that I mentioned earlier).

For the benefit of new members of the Committee, I should like to explain governance arrangements as they relate to the Australian Border Force (ABF).

1. The ABF Commissioner is a statutory office holder, who is operationally independent, and also holds the role of the Comptroller-General of Customs;
2. As the Secretary, I am the Accountable Authority under the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability (PGPA) Act for the ABF;
3. The Commissioner oversees day-to-day operations of the ABF - including implementing Australia's border enforcement policies, and managing maritime, frontline border law enforcement and customs activities to protect the integrity of Australia's borders; and
4. The Department provides corporate and other enabling services to the ABF;

It would be convenient if questions regarding the ABF, including Operation Sovereign Borders, be dealt with under Outcome 3, at the start of which the Commissioner would appreciate the opportunity to make an opening statement.

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